1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER FIVE

LAW AND ORDER

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Zongu, as part of the Maharajah of Sikkim's private estate, is administered for him by one of the Kazi, or hereditary ministers and landowners. It is at present under the Rhennock Kazi, who has succeeded the Mali Kazi. Except on very rare occasions the Kazi does not visit the reserve; the Mandals and Muktair pay relatively frequent visits to Gangtok to pay over the taxes to him and to consult him on any problems of internal administration.

Administratively Zongu is divided into twelve villages, each with a Mandal[1] at its head. Until the beginning of this century there were no intermediaries between the Mandals and the Kazi in charge; but some thirty years ago, at the instance of the Maharani, the aunt of the present Maharajah, the office of Muktair[2] was instituted. The Muktair is superior to the Mandals; he can deal with misdemeanours carrying a fine of not more than Rs. 60, while the Mandals can only deal with fines of Rs. 30 or less; he has to supervise all tax-accounts, and visits each village twice yearly to inspect the fields and see that grain has not been planted in excess of the amount on which tax has been paid; he has also to make a register of births and deaths. At first he was also responsible for the collection of taxes, but Tafoor's father, when he held the office, made a muddle of this job, and the actual collection and payment of the monies reverted to the Mandals. I was told that the Muktair receives as salary 4 per cent of the money collected and 4 annas on each house, but the sum seems to me excessive.

The history of this office of Muktair gives a good illustration of

[1] The term *Mandal* is not a Lepcha nor even a Sikkimese word. It is the common word for the head of the village throughout Northern India. It is however in universal use among the Lepchas, having completely displaced the Sikkimese-Tibetan *La-chen* and the Lepcha *Jem-mi*.

[2] The Sikkimese-Tibetan term is *Tong-yoop*.

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636 the workings of Lepcha democracy. The original appointee of the Maharani was a Tibetan (or Sikkimese; the Lepchas do not distinguish the two races) who lived at Hi; but the Lepchas did not like having a stranger set over them and asked for the office to be given to Lepchas; the Court, which is always sensitive to such petitions, acquiesced, and the office was split into two: the seven villages on the Teesta side were put in charge of a man of Hi, and the five on the Talung side in charge of Tafoor's father. The man at Hi fulfilled the office satisfactorily, and his son is now the Muktair of the whole of Zongu; he is a youngish man and has so far no male children; he gives general satisfaction in his performance of the office.

When Tafoor's father died in 1935 Tafoor should normally have succeeded him. There were however some objections to his taking the office; he could not read or write Nepali or Sikkimese, in which all official business is transacted, but only ecclesiastical Tibetan. Even more important was the fact that he was the only relatively young lama who was sufficiently learned to be able to direct the monastery when the present old Dorjé Lapoon died; and he was 789 the only lama in the whole neighbourhood who had the requisite knowledge and who had gone through the mystic training necessary 636 for the stopping of rain and hail. This power is firmly believed in by the lamaists of Tibet and Sikkim, and in the extremely rainy Talung valley is a most useful and necessary accomplishment. If Tafoor had become Muktair he would not have had the necessary time for these religious pursuits, and therefore, somewhat against Tafoor's private desires, the householders requested that he might be allowed to continue his ecclesiastical work.

636 While the matter was still undecided the Rhennock Kazi and the Political Officer came to stop at the *dak*-bungalow at Singhik. An individual called Tempa from Lingthem went and offered his services to them, and with his fluent Nepali and Tibetan made himself very useful. At the end of their visit he asked the Rhennock Kazi to appoint him Muktair of the five Talung villages, and the request was granted.

Tempa is a man of forty-four who was born in Savong near Gangtok, well outside Zongu. He claims to be a pure Lepcha, but both his character and appearance are different to the Lepchas of Zongu. He was the only man in Lingthem to have any facial hair; he had a straggling fringe of coarse black beard round his face. When he was about fifteen he became a coolie of the present

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Maharajah's father, doing menial out-door work. He was subsequently transferred to the service of the present Maharajah's maternal uncle and accompanied him to Lhassa where he spent three years in his service. At the end of that period his master was killed fighting against the Chinese, and in the same year the then reigning Maharajah died. Tempa returned to Gangtok and resumed service with the reigning Maharajah. Part of his service consisted in carrying letters and offerings to Talung monastery and bringing things back from thence. On his way to and from Talung he used to stop at Lingthem, in the house of Pumri, his present mother-in-law. Pumri and her husband had no surviving sons but only daughters, one of whom Tempa married; as is permissive in such cases Tempa did not take his wife home, but stayed in her house as *komok myok*, or resident son-in-law; thereby he became the heir of his wife's parents.

In character Tempa combines obsequiousness with domineering. Alone among the Lepchas of Lingthem he adopted a special voice, low and wheedling, when speaking to us Europeans; he despised us and thought we could be fooled by flattery, he tried to exploit us and to exploit others through our presence. If we went to the house of a third party when Tempa was present, he would assume all the rights and duties of host, elbowing the real host out of the way; he would offer the host's presents as if he were the giver, would fuss about and scold as if he had been appointed to look after our comfort, and would hand us over stones and ladders as if we were blind and infirm. He used to salaam and put his hands to his head whenever he met us, an action which has no place in Lepcha life; for very important personages Lepchas will unbraid their hair, but bowings and prostrations are uniquely reserved for the images of the lamaist gods. Tempa had a monomania about orphans, or else he thought it was a point to touch European compassion; nearly everybody he referred to, no matter what their age, was tearfully described as having no father and no mother; all other dead relations were also always named. Like Kurma, Tempa was always inclined to show himself as more influential than he was in fact, and insist that people had done certain things or followed certain courses at his advice or through his intervention. These claims were not always true.

When he was appointed Muktair the authority that he gained made him overweening and boastful and he used to threaten everybody who annoyed him, even, it is said, animals and inanimate

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objects. He is one of the very rare people in Lingthem who habitually hits animals. Finally, after he had been Muktair for about six months he assaulted with his stick old Takneum *youmi*, beating him after an argument about a matter of no importance. Immediately after this an agitation was started to get rid of him. The first person to make the discontent vocal was an old man of Tasso, in no way directly connected with either of the parties of the dispute. The Mandals of the five villages consulted together, and then each Mandal held meetings of all the adults where the matter was discussed in the greatest detail; these meetings were held in Lingthem monastery and at the houses of the different Mandals.

While these discussions were taking place, Tempa, though officially the superior of the Mandals, was forbidden by them to be present at any feasts or public gatherings either in the monastery or in private houses. Finally it was decided that so violent and irresponsible a man was unsuitable in a position of authority. A petition signed by all the householders of the district demanded that Tempa be removed from his office; they explained that he was using unjustifiable violence; they said that he was a stranger and did not know their ways; and they requested that the second office of Muktair be abolished and that the Muktair of Gyatong should in future administer their territory also. The Court granted their request, after which Tempa, reduced from all authority to the position of a private householder, was readmitted to the communal feasts and gatherings. No lasting animosity was displayed against Tempa but everybody knows the history and draws the moral; Tempa was angry, but being faced with complete unanimity he could do nothing. Today he is still angry with Takneum *youmi* and the two never visit each other on any occasion; they will, however, eat together in neutral places without quarrelling. This possibility of exclusion is the major Lepcha sanction; the person who is not allowed to feasts and who is not visited, who is in fact 'sent to Coventry' leads a very dull and lonely life; but more than that, if he is not allowed to help other people other people will not help him and it is hard to get through the agricultural and domestic work without help. Similar pressure, it is said, is brought to bear whenever anybody in authority, whether that authority be hereditary or through Court appointment, shows any tendency to abuse his position. It is a most effective control.

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TEMPA, THE DEPOSED MUKTAIR

CHALA MANDAL, THE HEAD OF THE VILLAGE

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[Facing p. 128]

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the top of Kinchinjunga to the far banks of the Teesta, which we could see churning away a thousand feet below us. To which village did we wish to go? Our informant rattled off the names of the numerous alternatives with machine-gun rapidity, but so far as I was concerned one place was as good as another. I said that I wanted a large village and one where the houses were all close together, since this would facilitate work and enable us to camp in the middle. In answer to this it appeared that there were two possible alternatives: Lingtem and Lungden. The former was said to possess a fine new monastery, whereas Lungden had none; also it was slightly larger and a bit more inaccessible. I plumped for Lingtem, monasteries being very much in my line, and thither we decided to go the following morning.

Very early the next morning Palden came to my bedside. During the night he had been talking to the villagers (they are constantly in and out of Mangen), and they were not so certain that they wanted us now that they realised we wished to stay in Lingtem for at least some months. They were suspicious of our motives, so he said, and were afraid that we had come to enlist them for some sort of service elsewhere. He also said that he was unable to allay their suspicions, since he himself, to be quite frank, was a bit uncertain about it all.

The Jongu people had of course seen plenty of Europeans. Most of them went from time to time to Gangtok, and many had been as far afield as Kalimpong and Darjeeling: also on several occasions the members of the various Kinchinjunga expeditions had passed through their valley; but this was a very different matter from settling down to stay for months in one village.

Amongst the Lingtem men was one Tempa who, I discovered, spoke Nepali fluently: also he was a man of some position in the village. I sent for him. I told him why we had come: that we Europeans had made a sorry mess of the business of living: that we had forgotten to a great extent what it meant to be happy. I told him also that at one time the people of Europe, too, had lived lives as free and

: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

kness or misfortune befell, therefore deemed it requisite 771
propitiate them, which they did by offerings of rice, etc.
ne first fruits of the season were always offered to the Good
pirit. I may state that the purity of their belief was, at a
riod antecedent to our arrival, somewhat perverted by
e introduction from Tibet of the Buddist religion; it has,
d still has, however, but little hold on them. . . .

"The British Government has again conferred on the 636
kkim ruler an annual and larger allowance, to be enjoyed 177
long as order is maintained in his dominions. Since then
e country has become more tranquil and, as far as the
ows (but no farther), is again thrown open to visitors.
kkim, however, is fast deteriorating. The influx of the
utias has increased, and the power of the Buddhists has
come firmly established; the Gurkhas have also com-
nced to settle in it, and the grandest and most glorious
nery in the world is becoming completely destroyed. With
e destruction of the forests in Sikkim, the charm of the
untry will pass away, the climate will change, and unless
edy measures be taken to prevent it, the Lepchas will
ne, and in time cease to exist. Much more might be said,
t enough has been represented to account for the
plorable fall of the Lepchas.

'Of the language I cannot speak too highly. The simple 192
d primitive state in which the Lepchas lived is admirably
own. It has no primary words (beyond the words for gold
d silver) to express money, merchants or merchandise,
s or markets. Their peaceful and gentle character is
nced by their numerous terms of tenderness and com- [195]
sion, and by the fact that not one word of abuse exists
their language. . . . Of all the almost inconceivable 824
ersity of trees with which the hills are covered; of all the 82
ost incalculable variety of plants and flowers with which
forests are filled; the Lepchas can tell you the names of
they can distinguish at a glance the difference in the
ties of each genus of plants, which would require the
l of a practised botanist to perceive; and this information

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Up towards the mountains there is a big cliff on which 614
many monkeys used to live. Below it was a limpid pool, in 773
which a young girl was in the habit of bathing. One day, when she was leaving the water, a monkey came down to her and the two lay together. In due course a child was born and this was the first member of the Sungvel clan. Now the land in these parts belonged to some Tibetans, seven of whom came one day to gather honey. When they saw how steep the place was they realised that they could never climb it, so they asked Sungvel, who by then had a son of his own, to climb it for them. Sungvel told the seven Tibetans to sit in a row by the pool, since if they came nearer they would be stung by the bees. He and his son then climbed the cliff. They tied their ankles together so as to get a better hold on the smooth rock-face, and by mounting on one another's shoulders managed to reach the place where the honey was. The son tore it out with his hands and threw it down. As soon as the bees saw what was happening they swarmed out and started to attack the seven men who were sitting below. They were stung so badly that the pain was unendurable: the only thing to do was to jump into the water, and so they were all drowned. After this Sungvel and his son took possession of the land, but the clan is now extinct.

I have already said that the Lepchas have neither tribal 636
nor clan organisation; but in order to regulate their dealings with the state certain officials have been appointed. Firstly, there is the *Mukhtiyar*, who deals direct with the Maharaja's agent in Gangtok. This is a comparatively new office, the present holder being only the third in succession.

There is but one Mukhtiyar for the whole of Jongu, and his 636
duty is to supervise and co-ordinate the work of the separate 622
village *Mandals* or headmen. The Mandals collect taxes in [651]
their respective villages and go once every year with the actual cash to Gangtok: but since most of them are completely illiterate they deliver their accounts verbally to the Mukhtiyar, who records them in writing. The Mukhtiyar 636
receives no pay but is entitled to a commission of four annas a year for each house on which taxes are paid. He tours all

636 over his district twice each year, when he assesses the tax to be paid on areas newly brought under cultivation. He also registers births and deaths. At the end of each tour he reports to Gangtok and renders his accounts in person. It may be noted in passing that local officials, whatever their rank, have at all times direct access to the Maharaja, with whom they may discuss their problems in person. The system is almost exactly the same as English feudalism at its best, and is free from the rigidity that makes British Indian administration so inelastic and impersonal.

The office of Mukhtiyar is not necessarily hereditary, since it can only be successfully filled by one who can at least read and write. The first Mukhtiyar of Jongu was a Lama of Lingtem, and when he died the office was offered to his son Tafoor. This man, who is also a Lama, is one of the most intelligent men in the village, and was one of our best informants. He felt, however, that he was unfitted for the post, since his education had been confined almost entirely to [789] classical Tibetan. Also he was the only man in the village who had learnt how to keep away rain; and because of this the whole village begged him to refuse the office. The present Mukhtiyar does not live in Lingtem, and we only met him once, when he came to pay his respects.

622 The post of village Mandal is hereditary. If he has no son, as is at present the case in Lingtem, the office will eventually devolve upon the man who marries his daughter; but when a man has no children some near paternal relative will usually be appointed. In addition to their work as tax-collectors 622 Mandals have authority to inflict fines up to thirty rupees, 692 but a Mukhtiyar may order a fine of sixty. Any case requir- [685] ing a bigger fine than this has to be reported to the Durbar in Gangtok, which also settles cases in connection with misappropriation of land; but there have been no such cases in 622 Lingtem since many years. Mandals receive no pay from the state, but each household is required to give him three days' free labour (or three men for one day) a year. This is to compensate him for the neglect of his fields which would otherwise ensue during his absence on state business.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
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rice as a food. The fact that the offering of sacrifices to the deities concerned with farming was preponderantly a woman's concern, leads us to conclude that farming was originally the work of the women. In the olden days the fields were burnt out in order to prepare them for the plantation. Part of the forest was burnt, cleaned up, and the cultivation of grain would be carried on for one or two years, after which the tribesmen would move away to another area. This is known as shifting cultivation. Today, the burning of fields is controlled by government, lest too much damage be done to the forests. The permanent field system is the common practice today. (Fig. 25-27)

The Rong originally dug up their fields with the use of the hoe, and they did not use the plough. They have taken over the plough only recently from the Indians and the Nepalese. The Lepcha's knowledge of farming was very elementary and they could by no means compete with the Indian and Nepalese farmers. There was a reason behind this. The Lepchas were not totally dependent for their existence on farming, for the collection of roots and plants, and hunting, offered them rich sources of nourishment. A little cattle-breeding goes hand in hand with farming. They keep a few cattle and goats ; sheep are kept very seldom, and at the most one or two pigs. The cattle are the mountain Zebu. The humps of these animals are feebly developed, but for the rest they are strong animals. The Zebu are generally of a black colour. The goats are of a poor variety and have no special breed. The pig, which is different in shape from the black Chinese pig, has as its forbear the black Himalayan boar. The stomach of the pig does not hang down low ; it has small erect ears, a strong mane of bristles, and a long and pointed head. A Lepcha who is well off keeps about eight to ten cattle, and among these are two pairs of oxen for cultivation. The other animals are milk cows and calves. The milk provided by these animals is used mainly for tea ; but occasionally butter is made from it. The number of goats reared is also not very large—ranging from ten to fifteen among the richer folk. The cattle and goats are driven to the grassy slopes for grazing throughout the day and in the evening they return to their stalls. (Fig. 28)

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Another myth of creation reads as follows: "In the beginning, the world was all water, and there were no living creatures. Then the Creator made an earthenware pot that floated on the water, and this was land that floated on the sea. Like a human body that is made of flesh and bones the earth is made of rock and soil.

In the lowlands the Creator planted the bamboo, the sisin-nambong. After that, he made the Lang-chuk Lang-dal, that are now known as the Himalaya mountains, and he created the pa-song pumun bamboo which grows at the foot of these hills. And then he created Pudung-thing and Nazong-gnyu who were the first male and female, and it is from these two that human beings were spread over the entire world. Then there was neither birth nor death; but this was created later to suit the world.

The seeds of all the crops were given by Pudung-thing and Nazong-gnyu to all their children who cultivated the land and lived on the produce."[28] If the elements are connected with creation it is surely due to Tibetan and Hindu influence. In the lowest region is the wind, and above it are fire, water and earth.[29] However, only two elements are mentioned: Ti-gung-thik, the first man who is supposed to be identical with fire, and Ni-gung-ngal, the first woman, who is identical with water.[30]

Apart from the earth the heavens were also decked out with the sun, moon, stars and clouds created by Rum.[31] It is also narrated that in the beginning there were two suns in the sky. One of these shone by day and the other by night. As it never grew dark, the earth suffered from incessant heat, and so one of the suns was shot down. Seven or more moons were supposed to have existed.[32] These, too, are mythological themes which the Lepchas have in common with the Indo-Chinese peoples. Myths about creation are very numerous among these tribes.[33]

28. C. B. Stocks, Folklore and Customs of the Lepchas of Sikkim, Journal and Proceedings, Asiatic Society of Bengal, N. S. Vol. XXI, 125/127. N. 4. p. 368.
29. C. B. Stocks, op. cit., p. 345.
30. Story as told by a Bong thing from Git biyong.
31. cfr. op. cit. p. 439.
32. op. cit. p. 336, Note 1, p. 383 sq.
33. cfr. G. Gorer, Himalayan Village, An account of the Lepchas of Sikkim, London 1938, p. 223 sq.; cfr. The Song of Creation in Waddell, Among the Himalayas, London, 1900, p. 294 sq.

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and each patron of some sort of grain. These seven brothers are progenitors and ancestors and guardians of the Lepchas. They were created by Itpomu who placed rice and millet and maize in their charge when she made these crops. The people of Mayal live in seven huts; they are immortal; each morning they are infants,—at midday they are grown men, and in the evening they are old. They all have huge goitres and it is from them that people know that big goitres are a sign of prosperity and a large harvest. They wear the traditional Lepcha costume of clothes made of nettle cloth and small basket-work hats. They are between gods and ordinary human beings; they are not gods because they live on earth; but they are not human because they do not die. The land of Mayal is far up the Tulung valley somewhere behind the Kinchenjunga; at some time in the past the road thither was open, but now it has been closed and is as unpassable as the cutting edge of a knife.

On the road to Mayal are three guardian spirits called Sog-po, who are brothers; the eldest is called Mayel-Yook-Rum, he is also called Pong-rum when the hunters offer sacrifice to him; his younger brothers, Mi-tik and Tom-tik, are cruel deities who kill and eat men and animals. Tom-tik is like a bear. They are the special guardians of the ibex and the musk deer which come from Mayal, which is the reason why these animals are so difficult to kill. In the country of Mayal crops grow a hundred times as big as here, and it is from this country that the seeds of our present crops originate. These crops are always ripe for harvesting. The migratory birds are called 'Mayel fo', birds of Mayal, and they are sent out by the people of Mayal to the Lepchas to indicate the seasons and the times when various agricultural acts should be performed. When the time comes for the migrating birds to return to Mayal, the parent birds die on the way and only the newly hatched ones survive the arduous journey to Mayal from whence they are sent the next year to act as indicators for the Lepchas. The people of Mayal have no wives living with them but the two oldest of the people Adoo-Yook and Alau-Yook, have in a way, as wives the two sisters Talyeu-Nimu and Sanguo-Nimu, who are the spirits of the earth: these two women lie on their backs on the earth

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and on their bellies are the cultivable lands. Into this Adoo-Yook and Alau-Yook send rice and millet and maize, just as if it were human seed from a husband and the women are fertilised and fruitful.

In the old days the path to Mayal was opened and sometimes the people of Mayal came to other parts of the world; and occasionally adventurous hunters found their way into the Mayal country."[36] According to other stories not only the seven brothers but all the ancestors of the Lepchas live in Mayal.

Another Lepcha named Ti-gung-a-thik and Ni-gung-a-ngal as the original ancestor. They lived a happy life and could hunt and roam wherever they liked. Food was available everywhere. Suffering and death were unknown to them. Their land was called Nemayal. Two Lepcha hunters once came to the land. The inhabitants gave them the seeds of gherkins, millets, rice and maize. The hunters however, forgot to ask them when the seeds were to be sown. So they went back again and asked them for the necessary instructions. The people of Mayal said, "When the ducks come back from Tibet, then you must sow the seed." That is February or March. Still they did not know a suitable season for planting the other seeds. They had, therefore, to spend a great deal of time making experiments until they found the most suitable times for sowing the seeds. Among these seeds was rice, which was supposed to be used only for sacrificial purposes. They chewed the husks of rice to see if the seed was ripe, and, finding it sweet, they began to consume it as food for themselves.[37]

The Dān-si Bong-thing from the Song-bur-mu tribe, who lives in Kafir-Basti, gave us the following information: The Lepchas come from Song-bur-tchu on the left of the Kang-chen-mdzod-lnga. In the beginning there existed only the god Rum. No demons existed at the time. The god had no special name. He then created a pair of deities, Agek-rum and Alat-rum, who are the protecting spirits of procreation. Ta-she-thing and Tōg-bu-thing then came into being. But

36. op. cit. p. 235 sq.
37. Report from Sam-sing near Maria-Basti.

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773 [776] the real god of creation is It-bo. He has a wife by name of De-bo. (It-bo and De-bo mean "to produce" and "to create.") It-bo first created a man Ti-gung-thik. He then took a bone from the body of this man and out of it he created a wife for him. The place where the first human beings lived was called Da-lon-par-tan. (This is also the plain in which the tower intended to reach heaven was constructed.) The first couple lived there in perfect happiness and contentment until they became sinful. When they fell into sin the god Rum punished them by sending great floods which continued unabated for fifteen days so that all the people were drowned. Only one Lepcha couple were able to save themselves in a wooden ship.

Stocks narrates the following myth of creation : "In the beginning there was only sea, and the creator Tashey-takbo-[772] thing made two kinds of fish,—ngo, was the common kind, while the ngo-yang had a serpent form. From the sea we believe that a tortoise supports the world, and on it Tashey-takbo-thing created birds and animals.

Then he tried to make a form of man from butter, but it would not stand up, as whenever he made it, it melted. (Had the butter only remained firm, we should all have been very beautiful). Then he made a human form of earth and mud, and wind came into this resemblance of man and life was created. Then Tashey-takbo-thing made blood out of the water which he put in it and the bones he created from stone. Then he moved away to see whether the creature he had made could answer him and speak, but as he had no nerves or veins he was unable to do so. So Tashey-takbo-thing picked a great many creepers from the jungle and from those which he spread all over the form, it spoke.

Thus was the first male created, but as there was no female he was lonely, and could not reproduce himself. One day as he was catching birds with his snare in the jungle, Tashey-takbo-thing entangled a woman in one for him to catch. So the man caught her and brought her to his home ; but at first they could not marry as there was no go between to help them to talk over the matter. But at last the Rum decided to send the owl (tam-bum) down the country of creation,

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773 173 down). They wondering greatly shouted up to ask the man at the top whether he really meant it. This time they heard the words 'ak, ak' (yes, yes). And they at once cut the tower down, which falling, killed many of the Na-ong, and those that remained had to separate on account of their not being able to understand one another. And even today broken earthern pots are to be found on that plain which is called Dalon-partan."[48] And so we see that the Lepchas also possess myths pertaining to the flood, to the building of the tower and the babel of tongues in common with so many other South Asian peoples, *e.g.* the Miau, the Lolo, the Thai, the Mikmir and many others.

(*d*) The Land of the Gods and Spirits

772 77K The myth describing the building of the tower demonstrates the effort made by the Lepchas to reach Rum-lyang, the land of the gods. The Lepchas are of the opinion that this land lies in the region of the heavens. From this land Rum is supposed to look down to earth. From there too, gods and spirits come down to the land of men, or they send messengers and strange powers in the form of thunderbolts to bring about strange births on earth.[49] On the other hand heroes, and the steeds on which they ride may occasionally fly up to heaven before actual dying. These are the same mythical motifs that are common among the Tibetans.[50]

The ancestral spirits, who, as we saw above, are in Mayal, are sometimes said to be in Rum-lyang. We shall probe into this question more deeply, when we treat about the cult of death.

According to other Lepchas, the land of the gods does not lie above, in the region of the heavens but below. Consequently they call this region "Dhing-song-rum." "Dhing-song" means below. The Kalimpong native on whose authority we have sometimes relied, indulges in the following line of reasoning, "The seed must fall down into the earth before it can spring forth and bear fruit. When it has ripened

48. Stocks, op. cit. p. 389 sq.
49. Stocks, op. cit. p. 336 sq.
50. op. cit. p. 337.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
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it falls down to the earth once again. This is the line of action from lower to the higher. And so it must be that the land of the gods must be below." In this as in other matters we find that there is a varied line of reasoning among the Lepchas.

(e) The Land of Souls

Some Lepchas believe that the souls of the departed go to the country of the ancestors, Ren djong or Mayal. Others say on the contrary that the soul goes to Rum-lyang. It was there before birth ; thither it returns again after death to be born again as a little child in the land of souls. Immediately after death, the soul goes to an intermediate place Sōn-lyang, originally called Sōm-lon, the leader of souls. The Bong-thing summons it back thence and asks it, at the death ceremony how it died, whether it was through illness or through the magic of wicked men. The soul then comes to the ear of the Bong-thing and gives him this important information. He makes the necessary provisions for the individual soul on the basis of this information. The Mun or Bong-thing then leads the soul to the Rum-lyang and locks it up securely so that it cannot return to its pristine home or relations or cause them any manner of harm. The entire ceremony is performed in the Sang-lion rite. A year after death the Bong-thing goes in a trance to Rum-lyang, opens up the place where the soul had been locked. There he finds a little child. He dresses it up in a child's clothes and releases it to live and grow up among the other ancestors.[51]

According to others there is an intermediate place called Tiamtan, or Sari-rung-dong-chen or Siri-nong-dong-chen.[52] Another place is called Nyo-lyang, the abode of the wicked. There are divergent views about the land of souls, just as there are about the land of gods. An old Mun woman of Git-biyong gave us this pertinent item of information, "We bring the souls of the dead very high up in to the heavens and very near the Supreme God, Ta-she-thing. He It is who has created us, the animals and everything else."

51. cfr. G. Gorer, Himalayan Village, London 1938, p. 353 sq.
52. cfr. Stocks, op. cit. p. 337.

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he had done this, he went up to Tiamtan where he built a palace and we, the Rong folk, believe he still lives there. It is a country that lies midway between heaven (Rum-lyang) and earth."[55]

The prime characteristic of the Mun or the Bong-thing is the heavenly calling to officiate as intermediaries between god and man. The Ling-gu Lepcha from Maria-Basti relates an interesting fact: "If, in a dream, a man sees a thread descend on himself from heaven, he has to interpret it as a summons from heaven to be a Bong-thing or a Mun. Those pre-elected in this manner must necessarily obey the summons and dedicate themselves to this office. It may happen that a man sees the thread descend on someone else. In this case he is not bound to reveal his dream to the person concerned, who will in any case obey the summons. If however anyone cuts the thread all of a sudden as the thread is descending on the elected one, death will unexpectedly overtake the one so elected."

The Dān-si Bong-thing from Ka-fār Basti gives us an illuminating account of his experience in this regard. "Before I became a Bong-thing," he narrates, "I became like one possessed, and was driven into the heart of the forest. I was utterly downcast and goaded on to a state of despair. As time elapsed, I got accustomed to this state and began to perceive the animals of the forest. The spirit then carried me to a dizzy and precipitous rocky projection where I spent the night. At midnight I was filled with superhuman strength, so much so that I uprooted a gigantic tree. The following morning the spirit brought me back. A man who had noticed me uprooting the tree reported the incident to my parents, who decided that I should become a Bong-thing."

At the age of about sixteen, the Gu-gu Bong-thing suffered from a malingering illness which left him in a state of perpetual exhaustion. As this state continued with an alarming uninterruptedness, his parents decided that he should become a Bong-thing. He agreed to this and became a disciple of the Bong-thing, A-thi.

55. op. cit. p. 340 sq.